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POWERFUL BLAST OUTSIDE HAFIZ SAEED'S HOUSE KILLS 3

The car bomb blast at a checkpoint near the Mumbai attack mastermind's Lahore residence on Wednesday also injured 20

ATTACKERS GOT TOO CLOSE TO HIS HOUSE

There is no clarity yet on whether Saeed was at his residence at the time of the blast. But heavy security presence in the area led to conjecture of his possible presence. It was unclear whether the car, packed with explosives, was remotely detonated or if a suicide bomber was behind the blast. A preliminary probe found that over 30 kg of explosives were used

SIX OTHERS CRITICAL, TOLL COULD GO UP

- The impact of the blast shattered the windows of several nearby houses. At least six of the injured are in critical condition
- Punjab Inspector General of Police (IGP) Inam Ghani claimed that hostile intelligence agencies could be behind the blast
- Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Department will take over the probe

17
OF THE 20 INJURED HAVE BEEN HOSPITALISED

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARWAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Forty Delta Plus cases in 5 states; don't panic: Govt

Genome sequencing shows first occurrence in a sample taken in Maharashtra on April 5

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

A day after the Centre issued an alert after the detection of a Delta Plus variant of Covid-19 in three states, scientists associated with the government's genomic surveillance project said it is a matter of concern but there is no reason to panic yet.

The Union health ministry while issuing a statement on INSACOG's report on the Delta variant with K417N mutation — also being called B.1.617.2.1 or AY.1 or Delta Plus — said this was first detected in India in a sample collected on April 5 in Maharashtra. AY.1 has been found in two more states, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, apart from Maharashtra, MP and Kerala. About 40 such cases have been detected so far.

INSACOG is a consortium of labs for genomic and epidemiological surveillance of Covid-19. It has so far carried out whole genome sequencing in about 45,000 virus samples collected from across India.

The government as well as scientists associated with the project said there is no evidence yet to suggest that this variant is more transmissible or increases disease severity. But the K417N mutation, which has previously been seen in the South African and Brazilian variants, has been known to evade immune response, raising worries against possible reduced effectiveness of existing vaccines.

"The government has done a good thing by issuing an advisory," said a scientist with CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology. "But we are yet to understand whether the effects of mutations are neutral, additive, or even bigger than the sum of individuals mutations because of small number of cases," he added.

An independent virologist said that in the wake of the new finding, the government should also reveal its future strategy. "In my view, a test like the one developed in the UK which is faster and cheaper than whole genome sequencing in detecting the mutation should be urgently considered and deployed here in order to understand the characteristics and progression of this variant," he said.

A health worker collects a passenger's swab sample near Krantivira Sangolli Rayanna Railway Station in Bengaluru on Wednesday | ASHISHKRISHNAN P

Worldwide, 205 cases with AY.1 have been reported from nine countries. AY.1 was first reported by the Public Health England bulletin on June 11. A retrospective analysis of samples by INSACOG revealed the first occurrence of this lineage from a sample collected from Maharashtra in early April.

JAB-O-METER

TAKE YOUR SHOT

June 22: 52,12,628 doses
June 23: 63,26,649 doses
TOTAL DOSES: 30,09,69,538

NATIONWIDE	JUNE 22	JUNE 23
Fresh cases	42,640	50,848
Recoveries	81,839	68,817
Deaths	1,167	1,358

KARNATAKA	JUNE 22	JUNE 23
Fresh cases	3,709	4,436
Recoveries	8,111	6,455
Deaths	139	123

B'luru patient is state's 2nd Delta-plus variant case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

A day after a case of the Delta-plus variant of SARS-CoV2 was detected in Mysuru, the state reported its second case from Bengaluru.

Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar confirmed this on Wednesday saying, "As of June 23, another case of Covid-19 Delta-plus variant has been found in Karnataka. One case was found in Mysuru on Tuesday and, on Wednesday, another case has been detected in Bengaluru, making it two cases in Karnataka. The patient in Bengaluru is isolated and being treated. As of now, there is no information that this variant is more severe or transmissible than the Delta variant. The Delta-plus variant is being studied further."

Sources revealed that the patient was a 86-year-old citizen who was diagnosed with Influenza-like illness with Covid-19. The samples were sent to NIMHANS early this month and tested positive for the Delta-plus variant.

Minister Sudhakar, who spoke to reporters in Chikkaballapur, also said that the issue of delay in vaccinating students aged 18 and above will be discussed with the Primary and Secondary Education Minister.

Find Delta+ variant Patient Zero: Experts

Experts have expressed the urgent need to find SARS-CoV-2 Delta-Plus variant's 'Patient Zero', and contact trace, test and isolate those found positive with his variant | P4

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson with the winners' mace after beating India in the WTC final on Wednesday | AP | PTI

Black Caps champs in whites

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW ZEALAND has a population of roughly three million. The player pool they have at their disposal is less than a 100. The revenue New Zealand Cricket earns from the game is miniscule, nothing compared to the Indian cricket board. Yet, these disparities didn't count for much as the Black Caps engineered a sensational eight-wicket win to claim the inaugural World Test Championship.

After a few days of a dank and gloomy start to the final, the last day proved to be a beehive of action. Under good batting conditions, India's famed batting cracked under pressure. The fabled New Zealand attack made hay when the sun shone, literally on the final day.

A collapse was the last thing Virat Kohli & his team needed. But when the skipper walked back for not much on morning, it was always on the cards. After bowling the Indians out for 170 (138-run lead), Kane Williamson and Ross Taylor, steadied the ship, bided their time and took the Kiwis home for only their second ICC title (they won the first in 2000).

For a side that had to wait 26 years for a Test match win — the longest in history — the WTC title has been made possible by an ecelctic bunch of cricketers that is considered as their best team. Not even their team of the 1980s comprising Richard Hadlee and Martin Crowe has been this competitive and invincible at home.

For India, this was an opportunity lost. Easily the best side in WTC cycle, all they needed was one good session with the bat. Instead, from the moment Kyle Jamieson removed Kohli in the sixth over of the day and Cheteshwar Puajra two overs later, their fate was sealed.

Conditions were in NZ's favour but India could have played an extra batsman. Or perhaps, they erred in playing two spinners. Kiwis had an advantage playing two Tests against England before this. All those are now footnotes as one the most underrated sides walk away with their well-deserved prize.

U'khand HC slams Covid death audit

VINEET UPADHYAY @ Dehradun

THE Uttarakhand High Court on Wednesday came down heavily on the state government over the botched-up Covid death figures, terming it "totally vague, sham, misleading and not acceptable". The division bench comprising Chief Justice R S Chauhan and Justice Alok Kumar Verma blamed the officials' lacklustre attitude for the 'bureacratic mess'.

Dushyant Mainali, one of the petitioners, said, "In most cases, the cause of death is posted as 'cardiopulmonary arrest' to which court raised questions."

Tearing apart the death audit submitted by the state health department, the bench said, "Whenever we ask about preparedness, you (health secretary) use terms like adequate, sufficient, tremendous efforts, etc. Sorry, this is not a meeting chaired by Hon'ble Chief Minister where you will project anything/something and that will be accepted. This is the High Court and if you paint a rosy picture and say 'it's Ramrajya and we are in heaven', we will not believe because we rely on facts and evidences and we are aware of the ground reality of this hill state."

CONTINUED ON: P10

Banks get ₹9K cr from sale of fugitive bizmen's assets

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi, Bengaluru

FACING a lot of flak over 'fugitive' businessmen Mehul Choksi, Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallaya, the government on Wednesday scored big political points when it announced that ₹9,042 crore worth of attached assets of the three have been transferred to the PSU banks defrauded by them.

According to a statement issued by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi had defrauded Public Sector Banks, causing a total loss of ₹22,586 crore to the banks. The amount of ₹9,042 crore accounted for 40 per cent of the total loss suffered by the banks.

The ED has so far attached/seized assets to the tune of ₹18,170 crore under provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) of the three absconding promoters, whose firms defaulted on payment to banks. The attached assets include properties worth ₹969 crore located in foreign countries.

Of the ₹9,042 crore, ₹5,824 crore has been recovered by sale of shares of United Breweries to Heineken NV. The Debt Recovery Tribunal, on behalf of the SBI-led consortium, on Wednesday sold shares of United Breweries Ltd.

The Dutch liquor company acquired 3.96 crore shares, or 15% in United Breweries. According to the ED, further realisation of ₹800 crore by sale of shares is expected by June 25. Public sector banks have already recovered ₹1,357 crore by selling shares earlier.

According to the annual report of United Breweries, equity shares accounting for 16.15 pc, held by a few promoter companies of Vijay Mallya, had been transferred to the demat account of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Mumbai.

CONTINUED ON: P13

ANDHRA HC ITSELF FILES 11 CASES AGAINST JAGAN!

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Vijayawada

THE Andhra Pradesh High Court has registered 11 suo motu revision petitions on the closure of cases, pertaining to certain comments made by Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy when he was in the Opposition, by lower courts.

Justice Kanneganti Lalitha, who heard the petitions on Wednesday, however, refrained from issuing notices to police, original petitioners, YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and others, who were made respondents, following strong objections from Advocate General Subramanyam Sriram.

The unprecedented suo motu action was based on the recommendation of the high court's administrative committee. When he was in the Opposition in 2016, YSRC chief YS Jagan Mohan Reddy made certain

comments against the then chief minister and TDP supremo Nara Chandrababu Naidu and the alleged Amaravati land scam. Subsequently, a few cases were booked against him in Anantapur, and Guntur districts. Police, who looked into the same, filed final reports reportedly in the absence of actionable evidence. The petitioners too reportedly informed the magistrate courts concerned they had no objection for closure of the cases. Following this, the lower courts had closed the cases. The court's administrative committee found fault with it and took an 'administrative' decision to take up the issue suo motu.

Advocate General Sriram argued that the HC cannot take up 'administrative' suo motu action using its powers under Sections 397, 401, 482 and 483 of the CrPC. He said it's the first time in the history of judiciary that suo motu action was being taken based on an administrative decision. CONTINUED ON: P7

State sets ground for holding SSLC exams

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE State Government on Wednesday announced Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for conducting the SSLC examination for state board students in the third week of July. Primary and Secondary Education Minister S Suresh Kumar said the protocols, formulated by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) under the Health Department, have been sent to all districts to be later issued to examination centres.

As per the SOPs, each exam hall will have just 12 students with one one student per desk with six feet distance between students.

A number of exam centres are to be set up across rural areas so that students don't have to travel to taluk or district centres to write the exams. The Education Department has been asked to identify at least two additional examination centres in each taluk and district headquarters as 'reserve centres'.

All examination centres will be equipped with thermal scanners, pulse oximeters and first aid boxes. The thermal scanners distributed by the board during June-July 2020 examinations shall be used for this examination also. Saturation levels of symptomatic students will be checked and N95 masks will be compulsory for students. Those with less than 94 per cent saturation will be sent for further medical care.

Two 'Special Rooms' will be dedicated for students who are symptomatic. A health check-up counter will be set up at the entrance of the examination centre and will start functioning at 8:30 am till the exam concludes.

WHAT THE SOPs ENTAIL

2 metre distance between students in exam centres

Students will be informed beforehand about their seating arrangements, so they don't crowd at notice boards

Entry for parents and persons other than examination staff and students is prohibited.

EXPRESS READ

Infosys' ₹9.2K cr share buyback opens tomorrow

New Delhi: Infosys will commence its up to ₹9,200 crore buyback from June 25, wherein the IT major intends to buy back shares at a maximum price of ₹1,750 apiece. The Board approval for the buyback was granted on April 14, 2021, and the shareholders' nod was received on June 19, 2021, at the company's 40th AGM.

India, US kick off mega wargame in Indian Ocean

New Delhi: India and the US on Wednesday kicked off a two-day multi-domain wargame in the Indian Ocean involving an array of air defence platforms to further consolidate their operational synergy in the face of China's increasing military presence in the region.

LOVE FOR WILDLIFE

White tiger at Ballari zoo now in RaGa's care

AMIT S UPADHYE @ Hubballi

AMID all the buzz in the state Congress unit over its chief ministerial probable, and away from the glare, a group of party workers from Hosapete in Vijayanagara district, decided to do something special to mark the 51st birthday of former party president and MP Rahul Gandhi.

On June 19, the president of the rural Congress youth wing from Ballari and Vijayanagara, Siddu Hallegouda, and his friends adopted a white tiger, named Arjuna, at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Zoological Park in Hampi for a period of one year in the name of Rahul Gandhi. An amount of ₹1 lakh was also deposited with the Zoo Authority of Karnataka towards the adoption.

Former Prime Minister and Rahul's grandmother Indira Gandhi was responsible for creating Protected Areas for tigers in India.

"We were planning to do some social work to mark Rahul Gandhi's birthday. Hence, we decided to adopt a tiger in our leader's name as zoos are facing a fund crunch," Hallegouda explained.

The Hampi Zoo authorities informed that the adoption process is usually done online and a certificate will be shared soon. "As the Congress leaders wished to visit the zoo and see the tiger they have adopted, permission was given for a short visit," said a zoo official. After a recent appeal from Kannada actor Darshan Toogudeepa, who is the brand ambassador of the Karnataka Forest Department, on adopting zoo animals, several people and organisations have come forward, the official said. "More than ₹1 crore has been collected over the last few weeks after the actor appealed to people to adopt zoo animals in Karnataka. Most of the adoptions were from Mysuru and Bannerghatta zoo in Bengaluru," said an official of the Zoo Authority of Karnataka.

Arjuna, the white tiger, which was adopted on Rahul Gandhi's birthday

Wildlife lovers have welcomed the increased adoption of zoo animals. "With the pandemic around and fewer people visiting zoos, maintaining the large numbers of animals becomes difficult for the authorities. During such times, adoption of animals by people and institutions gives much needed help for the zoo managements," said Jayram R, a retired zoo official from Karnataka.